

Please rewrite claims 8-10 and 12 as follows:

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8. (Amended) A semiconductor device manufacturing method comprising the steps of:

- (a) contacting a surface of a silicon oxide film with an aqueous solution containing any one of NO_2^- and NO_3^- ; and
- (b) forming an insulating film on the surface as obtained in step (a) after the film-forming surface is contacted with the aqueous solution.

9. (Amended) A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 8, wherein a mixed solution containing ammonia (NH_3), hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), and water (H_2O) is employed as the aqueous solution.

10. (Amended) A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 8, wherein nitric acid (HNO_3) is added to the aqueous solution.

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12. (Twice Amended) A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 8, wherein the insulating film is a silicon-containing insulating film which is formed by a thermal chemical vapor deposition employing a reaction gas that contains ozone and tetraethylorthosilicate.

Please add the following new claims:

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--16. A semiconductor device manufacturing method comprising the steps of:

(a) bringing a gas or an aqueous solution containing an etchant selected from the group consisting of ammonia, hydrazine, amines, amino compounds, and their derivatives into contact with a surface of a substrate to chemically activate the surface;

(b) subsequent to step (a), reforming the chemically activated surface as formed in step (a) by contacting the chemically activated surface with a gas or an aqueous solution containing an oxidizing agent selected from the group consisting of hydrogen peroxide, ozone, oxygen, nitric acid, sulfuric acid, and their derivatives to form an oxide film on the chemically activated surface;

(c) subsequent to step (b), forming an insulating film on the oxide film as formed in step (b).

17. A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 16, wherein the surface brought into contact with the etchant has a silicon oxide film or a silicon nitride film exposed thereon.

18. A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 17, wherein a semiconductor layer or a metal layer is additionally exposed on the surface brought into contact with the etchant.

19. A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 16, wherein the etchant is an amine having a chemical formula $\text{NR}_n\text{H}_{3-n}$ ($n=1,2,3$, R: alkyl group).

20. A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 16, wherein the insulating film is a silicon-containing insulating film which is formed by a thermal chemical vapor deposition employing a reaction gas that contains ozone and tetraethylorthosilicate.

21. A semiconductor device manufacturing method comprising the steps of:

(a) contacting a surface of a silicon nitride film with an aqueous hydrogen peroxide solution to reform the surface; and then

(b) forming an insulating film on the reformed surface as obtained in step (a).

22. A semiconductor device manufacturing method according to claim 21, wherein the insulating film is a silicon-containing insulating film which is formed by a thermal chemical vapor deposition employing a reaction gas that contains ozone and tetraethylorthosilicate.

23. A semiconductor device manufacturing method comprising the steps of:

(a) preparing a mixed solution containing ammonia (NH_3), hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), and water (H_2O);

(b) heating the mixed solution at a predetermined temperature for a predetermined time so that NO_2^- and NO_3^- are formed in the mixed solution in predetermined concentrations;

(c) contacting a surface of a silicon oxide film with the mixed solution after the heating;